



## **Do's and Don'ts: Picking the Right Equipment Part II.**

If I were to suggest one piece of equipment to spend the extra money on, it would be skates. Skates are the only piece of equipment that are involved in every save you make and a good pair of skates can really help your game. Throughout my career, I was always stunned at how much quicker I found myself getting from point to point when I put on a new pair of skates. Additionally, more expensive skates tend to be more comfortable than cheaper models. There are few things more annoying than putting on skates that hurt your feet or aren't sized correctly. If your feet are still growing or you aren't willing to spend the money on the top of the line, the second tier are an excellent option, especially if you are at the age where your feet are growing quickly. Much like new shoes, find a brand you like that fits your feet correctly and stick with it.

The second piece of equipment I would suggest spending the extra money on would be your mask. Your head is worth protecting and, when you are getting hard pieces of galvanized rubber fired at you at high speeds, a good mask can make the difference between a brief, mild ringing in your ears and serious injury. I've made the mistake of wearing a mask that wasn't up to snuff for the level I was playing and I urge you not to make the same error. Concussions, from pucks or players going hard to the net, are a real risk and, while never fully avoidable, a good mask can limit the possibility of sustaining one.

Chest protectors and pants are difficult to properly size and it can be a pain to find the right ones. Different brands offer different levels of bulk and sit differently on the body, making them pieces of equipment that are subject to a lot of preference. Some goalies like them bigger so they take up more room, some players like them smaller and more mobile. More than any other piece of equipment, chest protectors and pants should be tried on before buying. I also strongly suggest that, even if not purchasing together, that they are tried on together. Because of their overlap in the belly area, they interact with each other more than any other two pieces of equipment. If the two aren't particularly compatible with each other, they can be annoying to wear together or can leave you unprotected where they meet. Therefore, it is important that you determine how you want to wear them, either tucking the chest piece into the pants or not, whether or not to use suspenders or to tie the two together. Like all other preferences, the more you play, the more you learn what you like.

Like blockers, for the most part, sticks are more or less the same, with some exceptions. Newer composite sticks are remarkably light, but I'm not sure they offer an

increased performance or are durable enough to justify their remarkably high price. I would recommend foam core sticks for goalies at any level. I used them from bantams through NCAA level hockey and never had any problems. Things like curve and paddle size, like many things we have discussed, are based on preference and will evolve throughout your time playing. The more you play, the more confidently you can make changes.

As far as accessories go, there are a few that all goalies need. A jock/jill are, for obvious reasons, essential. No matter what anyone says, you should never step on the ice without one. I know a lot of goalies, myself included, that wear the same one for the majority of their career. The less you notice it, the better it is. If it is comfortable and protects you, stick with it. Always make sure there is something that protects your neck/collarbone area. Whether it is a collar, plastic mask dangler, or both, a chest protector or padded shirt is not enough. Knees are another area that too frequently go unprotected. Whether you use the wraps that come with most pads or individual knee guards, protecting your knees will save you from a lot of problems, both immediately and in the future. Like jocks/jills, the same set can be worn for years as long as they are comfortable and are effective. I also suggest all goalies find a sweat wicking base layer for your upper body, legs, and feet. I see some goalies that opt not to wear anything on their bare skin before putting equipment on. This can be both unhealthy and dangerous. Always make sure you wear a CLEAN layer of clothing between your equipment and skin.

I also want to touch briefly on style. If you spend any time online looking at goalie gear, you will come across numerous forums, pages, and profiles talking about goalies that have the best style of gear. Do not stress out about this too much. Wear what is most comfortable for you and you will have success. I do think, however, that there is something to be said about being comfortable in how you look on the ice. Goaltending is a mental position. If having good goalie style gives you more confidence, I do think it has the ability to help your game. Under no circumstances, however, should you sacrifice comfort or performance for what looks good. If you can find that happy medium, however, go for it. Everyone likes looking good, and if you can feel comfortable doing it, even better.

Finally, don't be afraid to change something if it isn't working for you. I've frequently stressed out about small modifications I've made to new gear or had buyers' remorse after deciding to switch to a new brand. Not once have I been disappointed with my decision and I know very few goalies who have. With that said, if you find something you like, stick with it! Commit to a brand you have had success with and you will have less adjusting to do whenever you get new gear. Getting new gear can be stressful, but rarely will you find something that inhibits you that you can't fix by a little bit of tweaking. All of the gear made now is remarkably engineered to do two things: protect you and efficiently stop pucks. Do your research, get properly sized, and enjoy your new gear!